Introduction

On March 8, 1969, Dr. Ohama Nobumoto, Chairman of the Council on Okinawan Problems (Okinawa Mondaito Kondankai), presented Prime Minister Sato Eisaku with the findings of the council's one and half year-long study of the Okinawa problem. Its recommendation was simple—"reversion without nuclear weapons, on par with the mainland, by 1972 (kakunuki, hondonami, 72 nen made)—but the task it set before the Japanese government was great.

At the time, the United States was still administering the islands as per Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan.

The author would like to thank the staffs of the Okinawa Kyokai (Okinawa Association) in Tokyo, especially Ishizaka Jiro, the Ohama Nobumoto Kinenkan (Ohama Nobumoto Memorial Hall) in Ishigaki City, Okinawa Prefecture, especially Yogi Genichi, the Okinawa Bunka Kenkyusho (Institute of Okinawan Studies), Hosei University, Tokyo, especially Professor Yasue Takashi, Nakamoto Kazuhiko of the Okinawa Prefectural Archives, and Miki Ken of the Ryukyu Shinpo for their assistance in this research. In addition, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for constructive comments, and former National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Morton H. Halperin for their discussions with the author on the decisions within the Johnson administration (1963-1969) regarding the return of the Okinawa and Ogasawara islands. Also the author would like to thank, if to their memories only, the late Suetugu Ichiro, a close associate of Ohama, for his discussing with the author so many things of past, present, and future, and the late Ota Seisaku, also an associate of Ohama, for sharing his recollections of this important time.

"Mr. Okinawa":

Ohama Nobumoto, the Reversion of Okinawa, and an Inner History of U.S.-Japan Relations

1. The author would like to thank the staffs of the Okinawa Kyokai (Okinawa Association) in Tokyo, especially Ishizaka Jiro, the Ohama Nobumoto Kinenkan (Ohama Nobumoto Memorial Hall) in Ishigaki City, Okinawa Prefecture, especially Yogi Genichi, the Okinawa Bunka Kenkyusho (Institute of Okinawan Studies), Hosei University, Tokyo, especially Professor Yasue Takashi, Nakamoto Kazuhiko of the Okinawa Prefectural Archives, and Miki Ken of the Ryukyu Shinpo for their assistance in this research. In addition, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for constructive comments, and former National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Morton H. Halperin for their discussions with the author on the decisions within the Johnson administration (1963-1969) regarding the return of the Okinawa and Ogasawara islands. Also the author would like to thank, if to their memories only, the late Suetugu Ichiro, a close associate of Ohama, for his discussing with the author so many things of past, present, and future, and the late Ota Seisaku, also an associate of Ohama, for sharing his recollections of this important time.

2. Ohama was said to have often used this phrase, perhaps due to the need for him and his Okinawan friends to overcome the discrimination that existed in mainland Japan against Okinawans. This message can be found in Ohama’s calligraphy inside at the Ohama Nobumoto Kinenkan.

3. A direct translation of the name of the group is "Discussion Group on Okinawa and Other Problems," but the official title used by Ohama is the one found above. An English translation of the report submitted to Sato can be found in the U.S. State Department files. See "Report Prepared by the Okinawa Base Problems Study Committee, March 8, 1969," in "Airgram No. 253, from American Embassy, Tokyo to Department of State on Okinawa: Bases Subcommittee Report (March 24, 1969)," Folder: Dof 15 Ryu US-US 1/58, Box 1617, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

Moreover, the Cold War was at its height, symbolized by U. S. involvement in the Vietnam War, for which troops and air sorties regularly left from Okinawa. In addition, a new president, Richard M. Nixon, had just assumed office. Not a popular individual, it appeared—incorrectly in retrospect—that Nixon would not do anything overly sudden or dramatic, particularly in light of the advice of his National Security Advisor, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, a grand strategist who viewed the world as a large chessboard. Nevertheless, eight months later at their November 1969 summit in Washington, Sato, pursuing the above formula, was able to gain the concurrence of Nixon and the U. S. government for the return of Okinawa without nuclear weapons, on par with the mainland by 1972. In essence, the report of the Ohama committee formed the blueprint for the Japanese government’s bargaining position and cleared up whatever doubts existed in Sato’s mind about the possibility of reversion.

Ohama, Sato’s advisor on the so-called Okinawa problem—the most challenging foreign policy question facing Japan at the time and the issue on which Sato essentially staked the success of his administration—played a key role in seeing the report through to its completion, and more importantly, on raising awareness of the “Okinawa problem” in Japan and realistically exploring ways to seek the return of the islands within the framework of friendly bilateral relations. After their safe return, Ohama, until his passing in early 1976, continued to take a strong interest in Okinawa as it struggled to re-integrate itself with mainland Japan, earning him the title “Mr. Okinawa.”

This article will explore the life and times of Ohama and his contributions to the reversion of Okinawa in the context of the U. S.-Japan relationship in the hopes that an inner history, focusing on one of the leading (but until now unexplored) figures of this story, will be revealed. The article will highlight Ohama’s role first as a Tokyo-based educator and benefactor of Okinawa in the welfare-education field, and then more specifically in the issue of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan as a petitioner-activist, president and/or chair of several associations related to Okinawan affairs, and then as an advisor to the Sato administration (1964-1972), and finally as someone who attempted to work at raising the social and economic levels in Okinawa to those on par with the mainland prior to his death. In particular, this article will explore Ohama’s involvement in resolving the “Okinawa Problem” in the bilateral context by looking at his role as Chair/President of the Tokyo Okinawa Kenjinkai (Association of Okinawans in Tokyo), Nanpo Doho Engokai (Relief Association for Okinawa and Ogasawara), Okinawa Mondai Kaiketsu Sokushin Kyogikai (Okinawa Discussion Survey), Okinawa Mondai Kondankai (Council on the Okinawa Problem), Okinawa Mondaito Kondankai, and finally the Okinawa Kyokai (Okinawa Association). Through a discussion of his involvement and leadership in these groups, Ohama’s efforts and approach will become clear, as will the history of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan.

The Early Years: Ishigaki, Naha, and Tokyo

The internationally renowned scholar and university president later known as Ohama Nobumoto, was born Ohama Shinbai on October 5, 1891 on the southern island of Ishigaki in the Yaeyama Islands group in Okinawa Prefecture. The fourth child (and first of three sons) of seven children, Shinbai grew up in a loving, but strict and proud environment, his family of the samurai class. Shinbai’s father, Shinsetsu, was a successful carpenter famous for structures that could outlast the many typhoons that hit the island giving it the name “Taifū Ginzā,” but the family was not particularly well-off financially despite its high social standing, as the island itself was generally poor. Despite this, Shinbai did well in school finally passing the preparatory teacher’s exam administrated by the prefecture in 1895 at the age of 14, just as the strong wave of patriotism was reverberating around Japan following its defeat of Russia, reaching even far-off Ishigaki. Because he was the oldest son, and by tradition (which was particularly strong in Ishigaki) would inherit the family name and home, Shinbai’s father intended to send him to school in Okinawa to study to become an elementary school teacher and then have him return to Ishigaki. Shinbai did not seem to object, and at 17, left for Naha to enter the only Ministry of Education-directed teacher’s training school in the prefecture.

Shinbai continued to do well at his new school, becoming the first in his class academically and class president. On the last day of his first year, however, Shinbai was suddenly expelled from school due to


7. This was the official name of the organization, although a more literal translation is the “Relief Association for Our Compatriots in the Southern Areas.” The official English name was expanded in 1962 to include “& Northern Islands.”

8. This too is the official name of the organization in English, which was the umbrella council comprising some 15 organizations by the late 1950s, including the Tokyo Okinawa Kenjinkai and the Socialist Party (Shakaito).
the “love letter incident.” At the time, exchanges of letters between boys and girls were forbidden, and somehow a thank you letter that Shinbai wrote to a female student in the sister school for a present received was found by the school authorities. Ashamed after being scolded by his teacher and his expulsion, Shinbai returned to Ishigaki at the beginning of the summer of 1911. After an unpleasant couple of months at home, enveloped by the disappointment and anger of his parents, Shinbai decided to follow his teacher’s advice and attend school in Tokyo. His sympathetic elder sister, Nae, worked at convincing their parents and soon Shinbai was off by boat to Kobe and then Tokyo.

Shinbai continued his studies in Tokyo in a preparatory school but in January 1912 was drafted into the Imperial Army. He requested the Infantry (hohei), which while less prestigious allowed him time to study. After two years service, Shinbai was discharged and after passing the necessary exams, entered the high school of Waseda University in 1914, as his brother-in-law was then attending the Politics and Economics Department at the University.

While in the Army, Shinbai had considered becoming a doctor, but around the time he entered Waseda, his interests had changed. Having been influenced by a friend who was a lawyer, Ohama decided to himself become one. Although he graduated first in his department and later passed the written examination for the Bar, he failed the oral part. He eventually joined a major trading firm, Mitsui Bussan. After two years working on marine insurance issues there, Ohama (he had since changed his name from Shinbai to Nobumoto17) decided to join the law firm of Hara Kinichi, one of Japan’s three most prestigious firms, while lecturing part-time at Waseda.

Ohama’s interests, however, began to gradually shift from practicing law to teaching it, and in April 1926, after four years working as a lawyer, left the firm and took up lecturing full time. In June he became an associate professor at his alma mater at the age of 33, having already published numerous legal studies based on his writings at Mitsui Bussan.

It was around this time as well that Ohama took the lead in organizing people from his home area, Yaeyama, living in Tokyo to create the Tokyo Yaeyama Kyoyukai (Hometown Friends of Yaeyama Association, Tokyo), with Ohama as Chairman. It was this group, managed by Ota Seisaku, then a freshman at Waseda (and later Chief Executive of the Ryukyu Islands from 1959-1964), who saw Ohama off when he and his bride Hideko left as Waseda scholarship recipients for study abroad in England in 1925.

Ohama originally planned to spend three years in Europe, but after 22 months in England and four months in France, was asked to return in order to take up an administrative position at Waseda. Returning in February 1927, Ohama continued his writing and lecturing on commercial law and social history. The classes were quite popular, but the latter brought him under the surveillance of the paranoid police that were gaining influence in Japan at the time, particularly in the wake of the passing of the notorious Peace Preservation Law (Chian Ijiho) in the spring of 1925. Despite this, Ohama was given more and more administrative responsibility and after a succession of posts, became Dean of Law Faculty in December 1945. In this capacity in the immediate postwar years, Ohama, while continuing to help out his fellow Okinawans whose lives were disrupted by the war, worked at introducing numerous reforms at the school, including international exchanges and popular election of the president of the University, which until then had been done only through appointments by the Board of Directors. Ohama himself was elected the 7th president of Waseda in September 1954.

Being one of the most prestigious private schools in Japan and the home of numerous influential people in the business, political, journalism world, it is no exaggeration to say that the post of president of Waseda was one that had a great influence on the direction of postwar Japan. Ohama, particularly in the connection of the unresolved issue of Okinawa and U.S.-Japan relations, used this position to the fullest.

Ohama and the “Okinawa Problem”

Ohama’s involvement with Okinawan issues did not begin all of a sudden at this point, but had been growing over the years. As mentioned above, Ohama took a strong interest in those from Ishigaki and neighboring areas living in Tokyo when he formed the Tokyo Yaeyama Kyoyukai. Some ten years later in 1936, Ohama became president of the Tokyo Okinawa Kenjinkai and in that capacity was able to help more of his fellow Okinawans in the Tokyo area.

Okinawans in prewar Japan, not to mention the postwar including the post-reversion period, faced intense social, and sometimes institutional discrimination, something which these sort of associations sought to overcome by self-help in housing, employment, scholarships, and educational areas.20 In addition, Ohama sought to fight these attitudes in his own quiet way by proving himself as an individual and not as a product of his birthplace (as reflected in the epigraph above).

Not everything went smoothly, however, among these Okinawan groups, particularly in the disruptive years of the imme-

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15. Ibid., 167-168.
17. Ohama would sometimes go by “Shinsen” as well, another possible reading of Nobumoto.
18. For more on Ota’s Waseda days and relationship with Ohama, see Ota Seisaku, Omono ni Zashitsu ni Nozete (Recording One’s Memories), (Tokyo: Chiao Insatsu, 1970), particularly 14, and 18-20. Ohama wrote the Foreword to Ota’s book.
19. For his time at Waseda, particularly as president, see Ohama Nobumoto, Socho Juninen no Ayumi (12 Years Journey as President), (Tokyo: Ohama Nobumoto Sensei Kiju Shukugakai, 1968).
nervous petitions during this time to General Douglas A. MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and John Foster Dulles, Acheson’s advisor and architect of the Peace Treaty with Japan. Their persistent efforts would pay off, both in influencing the Japanese stance, and in affecting U.S. policy. 24

Symbolic of his strong interest in providing greater educational opportunities for his fellow Okinawans, Ohama, on behalf of “Okinawan educationists in Tokyo,” wrote, for example, to Dulles in November 1951 with regard to the “future of Okinawa and particularly educational facilities desirable for that region.” 25 Ohama pointed out to Dulles (himself a lawyer) that the Okinawans and Japanese mainlanders “belong to the same race” and “both have in common history, tradition, language, and culture, having been united for centuries under one nation under the same sovereign.” As a result, they believed it would be “in intolerable from

24. One memorandum, for example, had this to say about the activities of Ohama and his colleagues. Their petitions were “of use because the Association for the Reunion of the Okinawa Islands with Japan is an active and apparently influential organization which has submitted a number of persuasive petitions concerning the future treatment of the Ryukyu Islands. It is also believed that the views of the Association reflect with reasonable accuracy the attitudes of many Ryukyuans and Japanese regarding the future status of the islands.” See “Despatch No. 982, Okinawa Petition for Reunion with Japan (January 8, 1952),” Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c: 021/1-852), RG 59.


the viewpoints of national sentiment, pride, and self-respect to see the Okinawan Islands separated from Japan proper and placed under administration of an alien country even if it be a provisional measure and even if the administration be on generous and humanitarian lines.”

Realizing that the establishment of a trusteeship system over Okinawa and its neighboring islands might be inevitable, 26 Ohama called upon the United States to adopt administrative policies “based upon the premises that the Okinawan Islands theoretically constitute a part of Japan” and specifically, to realize the following matters with regard to education: 1) application of the Fundamental Law of Education (Kyoiku Kihonho) and School Education Law (Gakko Kyoikuho) to Okinawa, with same textbooks and standard teaching materials used; 2) establishment of a teacher’s training university under “direct management” of Japanese government; 3) unification of teacher’s licenses in Okinawa with those in Japan to allow for “interchange” of teachers and maintenance of “high standards” in Okinawa; and 4) reeducation of teachers in Okinawa through adoption of postwar educational reforms, advanced educational theories and techniques seen in postwar Japan. The State Department promised “careful consideration” of its views in its response to Ohama. 27 Fortunately, education in post-war Okinawa (unlike Ogasawara) was continued in Japanese and Okinawans were increasingly given opportunities to study in mainland Japan, including Waseda, to the extent that the alumni club, Senonkai, has a particularly strong membership in Okinawa, and another alumni club, Seshinkai, had Ohama as its president.

Ohama did not stop with that letter. He and his group followed it up with a second petition to William J. Sebald, the Political Advisor to SCAP and high-ranking State Department official in Japan, on December 19, after Dulles’ speech at the Union Club on December 14. 28 Specifically, the letter called for the return of the islands and the “bringing[...].into line” of the administrative structure in Okinawa with that of Japan “in order to make the islanders conversant with the present Japanese administrative structure in preparation for the future reunion of the Okinawan islands with Japan.” The petition also described the “question of education” as something for which the “immediate settlement...is earnestly desired”:

During the last war...two schools [male and female normal schools for educating teachers] were destroyed by fire and teachers killed in the war serving with

26. Technically speaking, there were two types of trusteeships—strategic and ordinary—based on Article 83 and 85 respectively of the Charter of the United Nations. The former would permit unilateral control, but would require the approval of the Security Council, while the latter would operate under the authority of the General Assembly. For more, see Eldridge, The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem, particularly Chapter 4.

27. While Ohama did not keep many of his personal papers unfortunately, a copy of this letter was found in the U. S. National Archives. See “Letter from Robert J. G. McClurkin, Acting Director, Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, to Shinsen Ohama (February 14, 1952),” Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c: 021/1-2451), RG 59.

Japanese forces amounted to more than 600. It is extremely difficult to supply the deficiency in the complement of teachers caused by the loss of such a large number of them in the war, and we cannot close our eyes to the fact that the failure to provide adequate education will inevitably bring about uneasiness to the public. The only remedy for the difficult education situation in Okinawa is to reconstruct education with Japanese assistance by founding at the Japanese Government expense an education institute similar to the art and science universities, successors to the former normal schools, established by the Japanese Ministry of Education in all prefectures and be engaging able teachers from Japan.

Dulles’ December 14 speech was significant, the author argues in another work, because it represented another expression of his and the State Department’s desire to see the early return (perhaps even by 1952) of Okinawa through the return to Japan of administrative rights (and the retention by the United States of bases). Unfortunately, an agreement was not reached by the State Department and Pentagon for this to be realized by the time of Japan’s return to the international community in April 1952, and would not be realized until some 20 years later.

Omaha too would continue to take a strong personal interest in these matters and privately endorsed a call in the late 1960s by Director General of the Prime Minister’s Office Mori Kiyoshi and Deputy Uemura Senichiro (a former student of Ohama’s at Waseda and founder of Seishinkai) to seek in late 1966 and early 1967 the return of education rights to Japan as an attempt to separate the difficult issue of base rights from non-controversial education/administrative rights and to speed Okinawa’s “return” to Japanese control.

In the meantime, Okinawa Kyokai was restructured and its mandate strengthened in November 1953, becoming the Okinawa Sokoku Fukki Sokushin Kyogikai (Council for the Promotion of the Return of Okinawa to the Fatherland). Earlier that month, the House of Representatives in the Diet passed a resolution (authored by Sato Eisaku) expressing appreciation for the U. S. decision to return the Amami Islands (announced in August) and urging that the Okinawan and Bonin Islands also be restored. Acting on this, Nakayoshi, Ohama, and others sent a petition to both President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles requesting that America “be good enough to take steps to return” the islands “as soon as possible, respecting the said resolution reflecting the wishes of the Japanese nation.” The petition, which included one hundred pages of signatures, went on to state that Japan could “never be satisfied with the return of the Amami-Oshima group alone. Really, it is intolerable for us to see that the Okinawan and Bonin Islands are left in the present position.”

The U. S. government in the end, however, decided to maintain its control over Okinawa and the Ogasawara Islands, but this did not stop Ohama from seeking their return. In January 1956, for the first time in 30 years, Ohama visited Naha and Ishigaki to learn more about the situation there. Ohama had become President of Waseda a year and a half before, and his welcome in Ishigaki was huge, as no one from Ishigaki had become as successful as he.

Okinawa on the other hand was facing a severe crisis. In addition to violent crimes being committed, such as the September 3, 1955 rape and murder of a six-year-old school girl (the “Yumiko-chan incident”) by an American soldier, U. S. forces were in the process of expanding its forced appropriation of land in farming villages, eventually necessitating a congressional delegation to come out to Okinawa to observe the situation. The delegation’s report, endorsing the idea of “ lump sum payments,” was not well received in Okinawa, however, touching off the shimagurumi toso, or “Island-wide protests” beginning in mid-June 1956.

One of the important results of these protests in Okinawa and the media coverage they produced in the mainland was greater national interest in the so-called “Okinawa Problem” and the realization among government officials that they had been unaware of the real situation in Okinawa. Within the governing Liberal Democratic Party, a Special Committee on Okinawa Affairs (Okinawa Mondai Tokubetsu Inkai) was established in late June that year. This was followed in November by the creation of the non-partisan, unofficial Nanpo Doho Engokai, as it was called, was in a special position because it was not officially a government agency, and thus was free to act and advise on policy for Okinawa and Ogasawara. In actuality however it had been established with the strong financial and logistical support of the government and served an important role in being a bridge that the government could not officially support out of consideration for U. S. policies.

In 1961, Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato, who was strongly committed to helping Okinawa in areas of economic, social, and educational development, informally

requested Ohama to take over for Shibusawa who was retiring for health reasons. \(^36\) Ohama, busy with his duties as President of Waseda, asked Ikeda for time to think about it, saying that he did not have the confidence nor time to fully apply himself. Ikeda’s Chief Cabinet Secretary, Ohira Masayoshi, and Nanen’s Secretary General, Yoshida Shien, also from Okinawa (Shuri) and who served at the same time in the Prime Minister’s Office in the Nanpo Renraku Jimukyoku (Southern Areas Liaison Office), in the meantime put pressure on Ohama to accept by visiting him regularly, despite Hideko’s protests not to work him any harder than he already was. \(^37\) Ohama in the end accepted and became Chairman in September 1961, while still continuing his position as President of Waseda and a Council Member or Chair of some 50 other organizations. He would serve as Chairman of Nanen until 1972, when he became Chairman of the successor organization, the Okinawa Kyokai. \(^38\)

Because Ohama was preoccupied with the running of Waseda University, his role was primarily “honorary,” which was fine for Ohira and others who had urged Ohama to accept, because it was valuable simply to have Ohama’s name connected to the organization. \(^39\) Nevertheless, Ohama felt a personal responsibility, and immediately after becoming Chairman of Nanen undertook a trip to Okinawa, gaining a better idea of the situation there. \(^40\) Significantly, as Ohama recorded in Nanen’s quarterly report, Okinawa to Ogasaawara, he was able to see the “unfortunate aspects” in Okinawa through his visit to social welfare centers, having in the past primarily visited only education-related institutes. \(^41\)

Through the above quarterly, as well as newspapers and occasional books in English and Japanese, Nanen attempted to enlighten the Japanese and Americans as to the situation in Okinawa, with Ohama writing many of the articles himself. \(^42\) Symbolic of this effort, Ohama published Okinawa Problem: The Most Important Problem Between the U.S. and Japan in March 1967 on the eve of its third trip to the United States. \(^43\) This 89-page book argued that the inability to find a “solution whatsoever” to the Okinawa Problem “is giving rise to a sad state of affairs,” warning that this situation “can only deepen distrust on the part of the Japanese people toward the United States” and urging that the matter be given “serious consideration.” \(^44\)

In addition to the above trips to Okinawa, Ohama’s most important trip to Naha in his capacity as Chairman of Nanen would come in the summer of 1965 when he was asked to accompany Ikeda’s successor, Sato. While Sato made his famous statement that “without the reversion of Okinawa to the fatherland, the postwar for Japan was not over,” visi-

43. Assistance Association for Okinawa, Ogasaawara and Northern Islands, Okinawa Problem: The Most Important Problem Between the U.S. and Japan (Tokyo: March 1967).

44. Ibid., 2.


46. Ohama, Watashino Sengoshi, 68-72. This phrase meant that the person who caught the “Okinawa bug” became a strong supporter or fan of Okinawa.

\(^{36}\) Ohama, Watashino Sengoshi, 143. Ikeda, who did not directly request Okinawa’s return in his meeting in June 1961 with President John F. Kennedy in Washington, D.C., has been viewed as disinterested in Okinawan affairs, but as this and other episodes relate, he took a strong inter-


42. Ohama eventually wrote dozens of insightful and penetrating articles for the quarterly (whose title located in the same building it has been for almost 40 years, is not related to the association of the same name described above that existed in the immediate postwar years. 

Mondai (Our Country’s Territorial Problems),” Minami to Kita (June 1963), 25: 5-11; “Okinawa no Koto (Things Okinawa),” Minami to Kita (June 1963), 33: 5-14; “Sato Shusho no Okinawa Honom no Igo ni Seika (The Significance of Prime Minister Sato’s Visit to Okinawa and its Achieve-


3. This successor organization, still in existence and located in the same building it has been for almost 40 years, is not related to the association of the same name described above that existed in the immediate postwar years.

36. Ohama, Watashino Sengoshi, 143. 40. Ibid.

46. Ohama, Watashino Sengoshi, 68-72. This phrase meant that the person who caught the “Okinawa bug” became a strong supporter or fan of Okinawa.
the situation in Okinawa and discuss ways that a solution to the problems could be realized; 2) to work at influencing the governments of Japan and the United States, and world opinion; and 3) to hold public lectures and meetings to help shape public opinion. Ohama agreed to Chair the group and assume all responsibility for its operations.47

This group actually had its origins in another one comprised of Diet members and scholars and other leaders in society called the “Okinawa Problem Discussion Group (Okinawa Mondai o Hanashiau Kai)” created in April 1962, shortly after Ohama hosted Robert F. Kennedy at Waseda University for a lecture (which was temporarily disrupted by student protesters). Ohama’s meeting with Kennedy importantly provided the chance for “Okinawa’s most important native son,” in the words of then Ambassador Edwin O. Reischauer, to impress upon Kennedy the importance of the Okinawa issue.48 When the younger Kennedy returned to Washington, D. C., he immediately met with his bother, the president, and urged him to think more about Okinawan affairs. As will be seen below, Reischauer and Ohama would form a close alliance in seeking to resolve the Okinawa problem, which both saw as a damaging strain on bilateral relations.

In an effort to clarify and more actively express Japan’s views, this group in turn became the Okinawa Mondai Kaiketsu Sokushin Kyogikai (Council for the Promotion of the Resolution to the Okinawa Problem) in July 1964, of which Ohama became a representative, Yoshida the secretary general, and as an advisor, Suetsugu Ichiro.49 Subsequently, in June the following year, Okinawa o Kataru Kai came into being with an expanded membership of some 60 prominent individuals from all walks of life.

Shortly after Okinawa o Kataru Kai was formed, Ohama received a visit by then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeshita Noboru, who asked Ohama to meet with Prime Minister Sato regarding his trip to Okinawa.50 Takeshita, a Waseda graduate (Class of 1947) and personal friend of Suetsugu, had of course known Ohama for some time, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Hashimoto Tomisaburo, another Waseda graduate (’25), joined Ohama in his meeting with Sato on August 5 when Sato requested Ohama to take part in the trip as a special advisor (tokubetsu komon).51 This was not Ohama’s first meeting with Sato, and it would not be his last.52 But it would be the start of an important new professional relationship between the two.

This relationship was aided by another event, an irony of history of sorts. In May 1966, after student demonstrations over the handling of the building of a student center (in which students demanded the rights to manage the school-built facility), Ohama, who refused in his lawyerly fashion to give into the students’ demands, decided to resign as president of Waseda as a way to break the deadlock (while having his successor pursue essentially the same policies). It was a disappointing happening for Ohama personally, but it was fortunate for Okinawa in the end that Ohama was subsequently able to devote his full attention to Okinawa issues as Chairman of Nanen and be available to advise Sato on a more regular basis.

Shortly after this in September 1966, Ohama was appointed Chair of the Okinawa Mondai Kondankai, an 11-person advisory committee under Director General Mori comprised of many of the same members of the informal groups described above, including Okinawa o Kataru Kai, and former Ambassador to the United States, Asakai Koichiro.53 Its purpose was to further study the possibility of the early return of education rights in Okinawa to Japan (and in August 1967 was able to submit its final report to the new Director General Teukahara Toshihiko). In

47. Ibid., 71.
48. For more on the Kennedy visit, see Edwin O. Reischauer, My Life Between Japan and America (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1986), particularly 234-235.
49. Also see Ichiro Suetsugu, “Sengo” e no Chosen (The ‘Postwar’ Challenges) (Tokyo: Ooru Shuppansha, 1981), 207.
50. Ibid., 66.
53. This group was composed of Kaya Seiji (former President of Tokyo University), Oko Kazus (then President of Tokyo University), Morito Tatsu (former Minister of Education), Yokota Isaburo (former Chief Justice of Supreme Court), Takemi Taro (President of the Japanese Association of Doctors), Hasegawa Saji (President of Jiji Press), Kayoshi Shuzo (former Director of the Legal Affairs Office of the Prime Minister’s Office), Morinaga Sadachiro (President of the Import-Export Bank), and Shiakashi Nobutaka (President of Fuji Television).
55. For a report of the 1957 trip, see “Hobetsu Shusetsu Kichi Zashiki (Discussion of the Delegation’s Trip to the United States Following its Return),” Okinawa o Ogasawara (March 1957), 4: 12-27.
had settled in that the status quo was no longer tenable or wise, and U. S. officials were actually undertaking a full review of basing needs at this time in view of the need to consider reversion. Another factor that Suetsugu cites was the very presence of the Okinawan-born Ohama, a widely known and respected former university president, who continued to push the issues while offering practical solutions. Indeed, in messages sent by the U. S. Embassy in Tokyo to the State Department, it described Ohama as "undoubtedly the most prominent Okinawan active in Japan proper."58

Another important factor was the fact that the delegation had the full cooperation of the Japanese Embassy in Washington,59 Japanese Ambassador to the United States, Takeuchi Ryuiji, whom Suetsugu had met the year before, personally promised the delegation his full support, and Reischauer, since retired and back at Harvard, gave the group much advice along the way. Subsequently, both Takeuchi and Reischauer served as co-chairs of the Japan-U. S. Kyoto Conference (January 1969), which discussed the reversion of Okinawa and provided the blueprint for the report Ohama submitted to Sato in March that year, described at the outset of this paper.

Upon returning to Tokyo in May 1967, Ohama immediately met with Sato to give him a full briefing of his trip to America.60 Ohama explained that it was necessary for Japan to take the initiative in dealing with the Okinawa problem because the U. S. side would not simply or unilaterally give up its rights there, and urged Sato to establish an advisory committee directly responsible to the Prime Minister, a proposal that Ohama had raised in February. The result of this urging was the upgrading on August 1 of the Ohama group to that of advisory committee to the prime minister. Its name was also changed to Okinawa Mondai Kondankai, with "to" representing issues in addition to simply Okinawan affairs. Its first meeting was held on August 16, and was also attended by Sato himself.61 Indeed Sato, Foreign Minister Miki Takeo, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Kimura Toshio attended every session.62

The main initial task of the committee was to prepare a negotiating strategy for Sato in his November talks with Johnson. The Okinawa-Ogasawara issue had become the principal bilateral issue facing the two countries, and a clear signal as to how the United States was prepared to resolve the problem was needed. Fortunately like Reischauer, the new ambassador, U. Alexis Johnson, hoped to work out a formula by which reversion could take place and had been waiting for the Japanese side to take the initiative.63 Reflecting his pragmatism, Ohama and his committee agreed that a "two-staged" approach to the issue was necessary.64 Because so many complex issues were involved, Ohama argued that in the first stage Japan should seek a basic agreement that Okinawa would be returned, and in the second stage should then, after further discussions (eventually conducted prior to the November 1969 Sato-Nixon meeting) seek a commitment on the actual date of reversion. Subsequently, Ohama’s committee recommended that the Japanese government secure: 1) the commitment of the United States to the reversion of Okinawa within a few years (ryoassen no uchi); 2) the agreement of the U. S. side to the establishment of a committee to continue to discuss the problems associated with reversion; and 3) the agreement of the U. S. side for Japan to begin to take measures to raise Okinawa’s social, administrative, and educational system up to Japan’s level. This set of recommendations was submitted to Sato as an interim report (chukan kokoku) on November 1, two weeks before his departure for Washington and would serve as the basis for the joint communiqué released on November 15.65

In order to grasp the military considerations involved in the reversion of Okinawa, a subcommittee on military issues known as Okinawa Gunji Kichi Mondai Kenkyukai (Okinawa Base Problems Research Association), or Kichiken, was established in February 1968 under Ohama’s committee.66 Its members were some of Japan’s greatest strategic thinkers, and included those with wide contacts throughout the world, such as Wakaizumi Kei, a secret envoy of Sato who had personal connections with both the Johnson and Nixon administrations (with Walt W. Rostow in the former and Kissinger in the latter).67

Kichiken, chaired by Kusumi Tadao, a former naval officer and military specialist, met at an intense pace over the coming year (22 times in total). Based on the early deliberations of Kichiken, as well as of his own committee, Ohama spoke at a symposium held at Stanford University in California in early May 1968, during one

59. Ibid., 221-224. There may have been some probing involved vis-a-vis the cautious and protective Foreign Ministry. According to U. S. documents, Sato let it be known that he wanted the Foreign Ministry to cooperate with the delegation. See “Telegram 6577 from Amembassy, Tokyo to State Department (March 21, 1967),” Folder: Pol. 7 Japan, 1/1/67, Box 2243, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, RG 59.
60. Ohama, Watashi no Sengoshi, 79.
64. Ohama, Watashi no Sengoshi, 79.
66. The direct translation of the name of the group is Study Group on Problems of Military Bases in Okinawa, but was known by its official name above.
67. For more on his role as secret emissary, see Wakaizumi, The Best Course Available. In addition to Dr. Wakaizumi, the group was composed of Kusumi Tadao, who chaired it, Hayashi Shuzo (a member of Ohama’s group), and Suetsugu, an Okinawan born in Okinawa, but was known by its official name above.
The joint communiqué of President Johnson and Prime Minister Sato created the hope for the Japanese people that Okinawa would be returned in the near future. But it will not be proper to continue the present condition of instability without setting the actual timetable for return of Okinawa.

Japan-US Security Treaty will come up for review and possible renewal another 10-year term in 1970. Unless the timetable for return of Okinawa is clearly decided before 1970, there will arise a danger of a political dispute in that year with the Okinawan reversion problem only fanning the fire of opposition to the continuation of the security treaty. This is why it is desirable that the definite timetable for return of Okinawa to Japan should be agreed upon before 1970.

3) Okinawa's administrative rights should be returned by 1972. It is considered that the three-year period from now until 1972 will provide the U. S. and Japan with time needed to take measures to smoothly transfer all matters of civil administration from the U. S. hand to Japan.

4) After completion of Okinawa's reversion to Japan, the status of military bases on Okinawa should be reduced to that of those bases in Japan, governed by the provisions of the security treaty.

Any moves to allow for exceptions such as introduction of nuclear weapons to Okinawa bases or to permit the free use of these bases by the U. S. forces will sow the seeds of future difficulties as such allowances are incompatible with the people's natural sentiment as was already described above.

At the end of his talk, 78-year old Ohama emphasized again that the “cooperation between the United States and Japan must be continued absolutely in order to maintain the peace in Asia and at the same time” and expressed his hope that the United States “should not lose the friendship and trust of the people of Japan by sticking too much to the administrative right over Okinawa, which is... incompatible with the sentiment of the people of Okinawa as well as Japan proper.”

Upon returning to Japan later that month, Ohama and Kichiken continued with their studies as well as preparing for the January 1969 Kyoto Conference, alluded to before, which proposed the formula “without nuclear weapons, on par with the mainland, by 1972.” Indeed it was Ohama (and Suetsugu) who played the most important roles in getting the conference organized using the contacts of the members of Kichiken, as well as a list provided by Reischauer (as promised during their 1967 visit to Boston), and in convincing the Japanese government and financial sponsors of the need for the gathering and getting their support.

At the conference, begun during the middle of strong calls and protests in Okinawa for the removal of B-52s, Ohama, as Chairman of the Executive Committee, welcomed the delegates and gave his views of the international situation.

Rule by [a] racially different nation is regarded by the ruled as a disgrace and this leads to an emotional resentment against the foreign rule as is clear from the trends of colonial emancipation all over the world. Yearning for self-determination and political power is regarded by the ruled as a disgrace and this leads to an emotional resentment against the foreign rule as is clear from the trends of colonial emancipation all over the world.

Okinawa is placed under the jurisdiction of the United States based on Article 3 of the Peace Treaty. Few precedents, if any, exist that an integral part of an independent nation comprising a population of nearly a million people is governed by a foreign country. It is not only harmful to the dignity of an independent nation, but also unnatural. It is an undeniable fact that, since this irregularity was brought about by the defeat of Japan, it has provided anti-American agitators with slogans such as “disguised territorial expansion,” “imperialistic innovation,” etc.

68. The symposium was organized by John K. Emmersen, a former Foreign Service Officer who served as Deputy Chief of Mission under Reischauer in Tokyo, and who was then a visiting scholar at the Hoover Institution. Unfortunately, his memoirs (The Japanese Thread: A Life in the Foreign Service), published in 1978, and his other well-known book, Arms, Yen, and Power (New York: Dunellen Publishing Co., 1971), which includes a chapter on Okinawa, makes no reference to the symposium.


70. This statement is technically incorrect. The 10-year term was set in 1960 and finished in 1970. After that, as per Article 10, either party “may give notice to the other Party of its intention to terminate the Treaty, in which case the Treaty shall terminate one year after such notice has been given.”

71. Because even his own Okinawan affairs advisor held these views, Sato may have found it necessary to use Wakahama as his personal and secret envoy without Ohama knowing it in the matter of the secret agreement to permit the “re-entry of nuclear weapons and transit rights in Okinawa with prior consultation with the Government of Japan.”

independence is an instinctive desire of man. And the resentment against the rule by any other nation is not a challenge to the justification or the quality of the rule, but is to be viewed as a fight against an unnatural way of living.

This is the reason why the movement of reversion of Okinawa began early and is gaining more momentum year after year. Nobody could effectively restrain such a movement which is based on naive racial emotions. What we have to guard against in this connection is that the movement, which appeals to racial emotions, could be converted into an anti-American movement. In particular, since it is easy to find materials to criticize the United States, the underlying danger is so much greater.

In the case of Okinawa, the United States emphasizes its control of the administrative power as a means to ensure the operation of its military bases and their free use, and no other reasons can be imagined. However, the maintenance and use of a military base requires above all the cooperation of the local people. It can not be regarded as a wise policy to adhere to the administrative powers to the point of alienating the local inhabitants and losing their cooperation.

The Japanese Government under such circumstances has long been seeking the reversion of the administrative powers of Okinawa to Japan in order to remove this stumbling block in U.S.-Japan relations; fortunately, in November 1967, as a result of the meeting between President Johnson and Prime Minister Sato, an agreement was reached concerning the principle of reversion of the administrative powers of Okinawa, thereby making it clear that the deadline for such a reversion should be fixed within a few years.

Concerning the maintenance of military bases in Okinawa, although some people both in mainland Japan and in Okinawa demand that they be removed, the Japanese Government maintains the idea that the bases be allowed to operate even after the reversion, in due recognition of the role that the bases in Okinawa play in execution of the U.S.-Japan Security Pact as well as in the maintenance of peace in the Far East. However, it is far more desirable that in maintaining those bases that they are made totally applicable to the existing Security Pact. Otherwise, we are afraid they will become targets of future agitation.

This Conference has been planned on the expectation that, by frankly exchanging views on our common problems such as the problem of Okinawa which is the most urgent facing both the United States and Japan, as well as the maintenance of peace and order in Asia, we can deepen our mutual understanding and thereby contribute toward world leadership and policy decisions of our respective countries.

Sato eventually accepted the recommendations of the conference found in the “Report by the Okinawa Base Problems Study Committee,” and used it as the basis for his discussions with Nixon, whose administration began in January 1969, later that year in which the two leaders decided on reversion by 1972.

In June 1971, after more than a year of discussions, the reversion agreement was signed, and in May 1972, the islands finally were returned to Japan after 27 years of U.S. occupation and administration. For Sato, the postwar era had indeed come to end with the return of Okinawa.

The same may be said for Ohama, although his work was far from complete, particularly as he continued to try to help Okinawa overcome the disparities that still existed socially, economically, and educationally, right up until the time of his passing at the age of 84.

**Conclusion**

The return of administrative rights over Okinawa to Japan brought about the resolution of the Okinawa problem, a “cancer” (in the words of Ohama and others) that was eating away at the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship. The problem began when the U.S. government and Allies decided to permit the United States to adhere to the administrative powers to the point of alienating the local inhabitants and losing their cooperation.

For Ohama’s views on these issues, see, in addition to his memoirs, “Taidan: Yutaka na Okinawaken Zukuri,” and “Okinawa Kaihatsu no Kihon Shisei.”


75. For Ohama’s views on these issues, see, in addition to his memoirs, “Taidan: Yutaka na Okinawaken Zukuri,” and “Okinawa Kaihatsu no Kihon Shisei.”

76. For Ohama’s views on these issues, see, in addition to his memoirs, “Taidan: Yutaka na Okinawaken Zukuri,” and “Okinawa Kaihatsu no Kihon Shisei.”
ting scholarships for Okinawan students and funding for education and school buildings, raising awareness throughout Japan and the United States about the Okinawa problem and forming organizations and heading committees aimed at finding realistic ways to realize the reversion of the islands.

In any case, despite the varying opinions of Ohama, no one could doubt his devotion to Okinawa and his concern for helping his fellow Okinawans, as proven by his 50-year record. Indeed, this work continued after reversion when he became the first Chairman of Okinawa Kyokai in September 1972 and then as Chairman of the International Ocean Expo (Kaiyohaku) held in Motobu, Okinawa from July 1975 to January 1976. Less than one month after the close of the Expo, Ohama died after a short stay in the hospital.

Unfortunately, of the 4000 that turned out for his funeral at Aoyama Sogisho on February 21, there does not appear to have been anyone that could truly replace Ohama in the work he did on behalf of Okinawa, as a bridge between the prefecture and the central government, students and universities, and people of all walks of life. It is in this absence that one realizes just how large in fact his role and contributions had been.